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SUBJECT: KARZAI HIGHLIGHTS GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND
CONDEMNS CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN PARLIAMENT SPEECH

¶1. SUMMARY. President Karzai called on U.S. and international forces to prevent civilian casualties in a State of the Union-style speech opening Parliament's new session January 20. In addition to his appeal to revise the international coalition's military strategy, Karzai ran through a laundry list of his administration's achievements and challenged international criticism of his government's record on drug trafficking and corruption. Karzai also thanked the international community for its support and cited improving relations with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, China, and Russia.

Security

¶2. Karzai strongly condemned civilian casualties and other actions by foreign forces that distressed Afghan civilians in his speech before both houses of Parliament. The president called on the U.S. and NATO to review their military strategy and better coordinate with Afghan security forces. Karzai also lauded troop increases in the Afghan army and called on insurgent groups to join the reconciliation process. MPs, who sat respectfully quiet for most of the 70-minute speech, cheered the president's remarks on only two occasions: his condemnation of civilian casualties and a later remark in support of Palestinians.

Counter-Narcotics and Anti-Corruption Efforts

¶3. Karzai lashed out against foreign criticism of Afghanistan's counter-narcotics efforts, saying the government had made significant gains in fighting poppy cultivation in provinces where it held authority. Increased poppy cultivation and drug activity, he said, only occurred in areas outside of the government's control. He blamed foreign demand for opium and claimed most drug profits went to organizations outside of the country. Karzai also promised to continue to fight corruption, highlighting the role of the attorney general's anti-corruption initiative.

International Aid

¶4. Karzai thanked foreign partners for development assistance provided over the past seven years, mentioning the U.S. as one of the countries offering educational and training opportunities for Afghan students. However, he said the international community needed to re-evaluate its methods of channeling assistance funds. Karzai said he preferred aid agencies send money directly to the Afghan government, claiming significant aid money was lost to corruption when channeled through other institutions and companies.

Other Issues

15. Karzai raised a number of other issues in his speech, including:

- Education. Karzai praised the increasing number of students in primary, secondary, and higher education. He said new school construction would continue and pointed to improvements in teachers' wages and curriculum standards.
- Energy and the Environment. Karzai applauded work on hydroelectric dams and promised a resolution on an electricity deal with Uzbekistan. He urged the business community to import better quality fuel to reduce air pollution in Kabul.
- Health. Karzai promoted his government's record on health care, asserting access had been extended to 85 percent of the population.
- Infrastructure. Karzai detailed completed or ongoing road projects, adding the government needed to address maintenance issues. He also thanked Japan for the new Kabul International Airport terminal.
- Media. Karzai said the media needed to protect the nation's religious and historical interests in addition to its own freedoms. He said "unfortunate circles" in the media were sowing disunity.
- Women. Karzai urged action to prevent violence against women. He praised women for increasing their participation in society and education.
- Refugees. Karzai said refugees needed to return voluntarily and asked Afghan communities and government bodies to prepare for their arrival.
- Gaza. Karzai condemned civilian casualties in Gaza and asked the international community to do more to restore stability there. (Traditionally moderate on the Palestinian

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issue, Karzai's remarks on the situation on Gaza have been restrained.)

Parliament Speakers Bookend Karzai's Remarks

16. Lower and Upper House Speakers Yunus Qanooni and Sebghatullah Mojaddedi delivered remarks before and after the president, respectively. Qanooni promised Parliament's continued support for the fight against terrorism and commemorated the MPs killed in the November 2007 Baghlan bombing. Qanooni closed with a promise to always act in accordance with the Constitution, a possible reference to Parliament's ongoing election date dispute with Karzai. Mojaddedi, speaking last, delivered a feisty 15-minute speech, echoing Karzai's comments on civilian casualties, Gaza, and foreign demand for opium. In a light-hearted moment, Mojaddedi referenced his brief time as head of a transitional government, telling MPs, "if you had left me in charge, I would have solved all of these problems by now."
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